

DULUTH AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, April 16, 2007 - 5:00 p.m.
Room 402 - Fourth Floor, City Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Robert Powless, Donna Ennis, Michele Gordon, Warner Wirta, Joy Dorscher, Tony LaDeaux, John Day, Brian Wilson, Ricky Defoe, Mike Sayers

EXCUSED ABSENT: Beatrice Kitto

ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: John Judd

OTHERS PRESENT: See sign-in sheet

CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Motion by Dr. Powless, seconded by Brian Wilson, to approve the agenda, with the change that Eric Larson will not be here as planned and an additional item concerning a book put forward by W. Wirta. The motion was unanimously approved.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 19, 2007 MEETING:

Motion by Dr. Powless, seconded by Brian Wilson, to approve the minutes, with the correction of the spelling of Ricky Defoe's first name. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMUNITY PUBLIC FORUM / OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

St. Scholastica Nursing Mentor Program – Toni Pearson from the College of St. Scholastica (CSS) talked about the MENTUR (More Education for Nurses That Are Under-Represented) grant awarded to CSS intended to increase diversity among nursing students there. This is a three-year grant. American Indians are a primary focus for recruitment. The grant is also available to students at community colleges. Dr. Powless suggested that Pearson call his daughter in the Twin Cities for ideas on how to implement the grant. Day and Dorscher inquired about participation with tribal colleges. Sayers inquired about financial aid issues. Defoe stressed the importance of reaching prospective students before they are discouraged by the financial aid process. Other established scholarships can be applied for to supplement the grant.

Public Comment – Verna Cyrette described incidents of harassment and discrimination by Duluth Police, County Social Services employees, and court personnel that have affected her and her children. Ennis reminded the Commission that Indian Child

Welfare issues will be on the October agenda. Wirta, Defoe and Day pointed out that many of those in public positions and social services who should know about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) do not, and others are aware of it but disagree with and disregard it. Ennis reminded the group that cases involving Indian children can be transferred to tribal court. Gordon proposed that the entire October meeting be devoted to this issue. Dr. Powless suggested that these issues be discussed even earlier than October and that the Commission invite someone from Indian Legal Services talk about the Act and its enforcement.

Motion by Donna Ennis, seconded by John Day, to exchange the July and October discussion items on the DAIC's Calendar/Agenda, thus moving ICWA issues to July. The motion was unanimously approved.

Courage Duluth - Eric Larson (asked to be postponed until May meeting)

American Indian Contributions to the World (book) – Warner Wirta brought this resource to the attention of the Commission. He would like to see the Commission promote it to the Duluth Public Schools as well as the tribes and City representatives. It is the kind of reading material that can affect American Indian children's self-esteem in a positive way. Discussion: Defoe expressed concern about reservations turning away from teaching some of the older traditions. He also recommended checking the authority of the book. Dr. Powless suggested adding Jack Weatherford's (of Macalester College) book to the recommendation to the school district and Tribe.

Motion by Warner Wirta, seconded by Tony LaDeaux, to send a letter to the Duluth School District and the Minnesota Chippewa tribe to make American Indian Contributions to the World and a second similar book by Jack Weatherford a required part of the Duluth school district curriculum.

OLD BUSINESS:

Report on the Indian Center / Housing Project – Sherry Sanchez Tibbetts thanked Dr. and Mrs. Powless for their generous contribution to the Center / Housing Project. Sanchez Tibbetts and Dr. Powless met with Chairman Deschampe to request a letter of support from the Fond du Lac tribe. Letters of support were also promised from Grand Portage, Mille Lacs.

Sayers asked about another Duluth group who has been meeting to discuss a similar project. Sanchez Tibbetts is aware of this group as a grass-roots organization with no formal or legitimate structure. Sayers will attend one of their upcoming meetings, which take place at the Damiano Center on Wednesdays at 5:00 p.m., and will report back to the Commission. A man falsely representing himself as an attorney has been calling various members associated with the Indian Center / Housing Project, which is a concern. Judd suggested sending a letter to AICO identifying the legitimate body behind the project after hearing Sayers' report.

Report on IDS 709 Desegregation Programs – Tony LaDeaux reported on concerns that do not hit the paper. Representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) were present at a March 12 meeting; 40 principals were also in attendance. The ACLU feels it is obvious ISD 709 has not lived up to its promises related to the lawsuit brought about in 2003. Superintendent Dixon may be more effective in bringing about change.

LaDeaux described the Aztec Circle, a 12-week dialog program that has seemed to produce positive results among individuals involved in desegregation efforts.

There will be a meeting on April 23 with parents and youth at Holy Family Church to discuss the state of diversity in ISD 709.

Report on IDS 709 Physical Planning Proposals – Dr. Powless distributed copies of a document titled “Details about Three Options for Duluth’s Public Schools.” He suggested that Commission members attend meetings in their neighborhoods and ask two main questions: “Are diversity programs going to be worked in through all of the options?” and “How will culturally diverse students--Indian students in particular--be broken up in each option?”

(Deputy City Attorney Alison Luterman, who has advised the Commission on various issues, recently lost both parents. Dr. Powless will send a sympathy card on behalf of the Commission.)

Review Letter of Support for the St. Louis County, 10-year Plan to End Homelessness – Joyce Kramer, co-chair of the Duluth Mayor’s Grass Roots Commission to End Homelessness, expressed approval of the letter.

Motion by John Day, seconded by Dr. Powless, to approve and send the letter. The motion was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS:

1854 Treaty Authority – David Woodward updated the Commission on Cultural Resource Management at 1854 Treaty Authority. Bois Forte requested the Cultural Resource Management. Of concern are natural and cultural resources that are significant to the tribal governments. There is a steering committee of 35 members from various tribes and Woodward. Whenever Indian Commission members become aware of developments that could affect Indian resources, Woodward advised them to contact him. Current concerns include Pigeon Point, in Grand Portage territory, where mineral rights supersede surface rights, and U.S. Steel’s Three Bays Development in the Vermilion area. Dorscher asked if there was any way the Indian Commission could help. Woodward requested that they help make sure American Indian voices were heard on related issues.

Planning for Semi-Annual Community Forum - Ennis suggested having the Forum at the Washington Center in August. Day proposed having a mini-powwow as part of the event. Possible dates: August 23 or 30.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, UPCOMING EVENTS AND COMMENTS FROM COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Dr. Powless read in the St. Paul paper that the 50th Minnesota soldier was killed in Iraq. The mean age of the soldiers was 21.7. This underscores the need to change things in this country for people in general, and especially for Indian children.

Brian Wilson brought up the shooting incident at Virginia Tech and how it put him in a similar frame of mind as Dr. Powless.

Defoe attended activities celebrating Indian art and culture at CSS last week. There will be events at Fond du Lac next Wednesday at 5:30; the focus will be issues affecting men. Traditional events to follow on Thursday.

Judd announced that the Commission is an official sponsor of the City's Night Out event in August. He also made copies of a collection of newspaper articles on crimes against Indians.

LaDeaux mentioned that he learned about the web site www.duluthcops.com, which is interesting but not always accurate.

Ennis requested an updated list of Commission members. Judd will e-mail them to the Commission. Several members' terms will be up in May.

Gordon announced the powwow at UMD at Wessman Arena on Saturday, April 21; Grand Entry at 1:00 and feast 5:00.

Dorscher announced that Dr. Powless has a new computer. She also reported there are seven American Indians graduating from the medical schools at UMD and the University of Minnesota this spring. She commented on the significance of Don Imus' recent racist statement and its consequences. She expressed her appreciation for working with this group.

NEXT MEETING/DATE/LOCATION

Monday, May 21, 2007 at 5:00 p.m., Room 402 City Hall.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:55 p.m.